

BLUE MOUNTAIN TRANSLATOR DISTRICT HOPES TO INFORM VIEWERS ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

# Translator District speeding effort to add public access channel to lineup

By Dick Mason

The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — Residents of Union and Baker counties who receive their television signals from the Blue Mountain Translator District soon will be closer to the pulse of the coronavirus crisis.

The district is speeding up its effort to get a non-commercial, public access-type television channel on the air, one which will help residents of the two counties keep up with what their governments are doing on the local level and receive emergency information much faster.

The district board voted Monday to begin working toward getting a public access channel operating. District Executive Director Alex McHaddad said he and his board had planned to wait until July to get a public access channel on

the air but decided instead to do it as soon as possible due to the growing crisis.

“The time is right to do this,” McHaddad said. “We should have it up in about three weeks. That is the goal.”

The new channel will provide live broadcasts of meetings of the county commissioners, city councils and school boards, information about emergency situations and more. Viewers will be able to watch broadcasts of these meetings on television and online via livestreaming.

McHaddad said an increasing number of people are going to want to watch government board meetings because of coronavirus and they will not be able to attend due to new state restrictions on prohibiting gatherings. The channel will help residents keep up with what their local

government is doing. It also will help get the word out about new developments.

District board member Christina Wood said the channel would, for example, broadcast information about the local distribution of medicine for the treatment of the virus.

“We have to get information on the ground to everyone,” Wood said. “We speeded up the pace because of this.”

McHaddad said emergency service providers, including Union County and Grande Ronde Hospital, will be able to quickly share urgent messages via the public access channel.

The BMTD board will work with TelVue Corporation, a broadcast technology firm, and Sinclair Broadcasting, in getting the new channel on the air at a cost of \$23,000. McHaddad said he hopes

sponsorships will offset the cost of setting up the new channel.

He told his board Monday getting the new channel up and running will not stretch the district’s budget too thin, noting its reserve fund will remain solid.

“If something blows up, the BMTD will still have the money it needs to make repairs,” McHaddad said.

He said the new channel will operate at least through the crisis. If the channel is not self-supporting by that point, the district might shut it down until the board develops a sustainable plan.

The 2019 Legislature’s passage of Senate Bill 394 makes the channel possible. The bill gives a public translator district the authority to use the technology necessary to create public access-type channels.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Baker School District postpones pre-kindergarten screening

Although the Baker School District is prepared for its annual readiness screening of the community’s pre-kindergarten children, the process has been put on hold.

The screening will be postponed in compliance with Gov. Kate Brown’s directive for Oregonians to “stay home and stay safe,” a District press release states. The annual screening of children who will turn 5 by Sept. 1 was set to begin at area preschools this year on Wednesday, April 1.

“The materials are in. Our screening team is set. We are anxious to see the kids,” Assistant Superintendent Betty Palmer, stated in the press release. “However, in order to follow the governor’s directive to keep everyone safe, we will postpone the screening until later this spring or early summer.”

Linda Honeywell, the district’s pre-kindergarten screening director, has contacted preschool providers to schedule the screenings. Notices were sent to preschool teachers and packets were distributed to parents. The packets included permission slips for screening and parent information forms with information about their child’s readiness skills.

The District is asking parents to fill out the forms and permission slips even though the screening has been postponed. The information can be returned to the District Office at 2090 Fourth St. Haines and Keating residents may return their forms to those schools.

New screening dates will be announced based on the governor’s direction on how to proceed.

# Baker man arrested days after being put on probation

James Edward Grove also testified before grand jury in ongoing murder case

By Chris Collins

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A Baker City man with an extensive criminal history who was placed on three years’ probation last week on convictions for first-degree burglary and first-degree theft in an agreement with the District Attorney’s Office is back in jail, accused of violating terms of his probation.

James Edward Grove, 42, of 3920 G St., was arraigned on the probation violation charge Wednesday in Baker County Circuit Court. Grove was ordered held without bail.

District Attorney Greg Baxter said he would consider

new charges against Grove after reviewing details of police reports regarding Grove’s Tuesday morning arrest.

According to court records, the stipulated agreement between Baxter and Grove’s attorney, Bob Moon of Baker City, at Grove’s March 19 sentencing included special conditions requiring him to testify at a grand jury proceeding and to testify honestly and consistently with his initial interview with police at trial.

According to court records, Grove testified March 19 before a grand jury in the investigation of the shooting death of Angela Michelle Par-

rish, 30, of Vale.

Shawn Quentin Greenwood, 49, of Vale, is charged with murdering Parrish, Greenwood’s former girlfriend, on Jan. 13 in Baker City.

Greenwood also is being held on two counts of second-degree assault for allegedly shooting Nathaniel Brown, 37, a Baker City transient, in the hand that same day. A fourth charge accuses Greenwood of fleeing or attempting to elude police in connection with the crimes.

After the grand jury heard further testimony on March 19, a first amended indictment was issued charging

Greenwood with solicitation to commit murder.

According to the indictment, Greenwood on Jan. 22 solicited Reed Siddoway, a Malheur County resident, to kill Nathaniel Brown.

Other grand jury witnesses in addition to Grove were Wade Holom, a Malheur County Sheriff’s deputy; Sgt. Craig Rilee of the Baker County Sheriff’s Office; Nathaniel Brown; and Baker City Police officers Shannon Regan and Chris Sells.

Special terms of Grove’s probation require him to cooperate fully with the investigation and state that any testimony that deviates from

his initial interview with law enforcement will be grounds to revoke his probation.

An additional count of first-degree burglary and one count each of felon in possession of a firearm and third-degree criminal mischief were dismissed as part of Grove’s plea agreement.

If Grove’s probation is revoked, he faces 70 months in prison, according to the court record. His next court appearance is set for April 2.

Baker City Police Chief Ray Duman said Grove was arrested at 6:22 a.m. Tuesday when police were called to the 2600 block of 12th Street on a report of criminal trespassing and criminal mischief.

Duman said Grove overstepped permission a family

member had given him to stay the night in the basement of the home of Karen Bernardy and Jose Yanez.

Duman said about 4 a.m. Tuesday, Grove entered the bedroom of Bernardy’s daughter, Raeganne Terrell, 46, and would not allow her to leave the room. Terrell was not hurt in the incident, Duman said.

Grove then went into the bedroom of Bernardy and Yanez and caused a disturbance. Duman said Yanez grabbed a gun and chased Grove out the door.

Once outside, Grove picked up a piece of wood and threw it through a window in the back of the house. Damage is estimated at about \$300, Duman said.

## BIGHORNS

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Of the more than 50 identified strains of *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, some can eliminate an entire herd relatively rapidly, while others are comparatively mild and kill few animals, Ratliff said.

“I don’t know how bad it’s going to be,” he said Thursday.

The threat is serious enough, however, that ODFW this week canceled the two bighorn sheep hunts scheduled this summer and fall in the Lookout Mountain unit.

Those hunts included three tags — two for Oregon hunters and one for a nonresident.

“I’m always going to err on the side of caution,” Ratliff said.

Ratliff said he and other ODFW employees are regularly monitoring bighorns in the Lookout Mountain unit to try to gauge the lethality of the bacteria strain.

This is relatively easy to do because the bighorns, and in particular the ewes, lambs and young rams, tend to congregate in early spring along the Snake River Road between Huntington and Richland, where they graze on new grass.

“It’s a great viewing opportunity for the public, as these sheep are highly visible,” Ratliff said.

### The investigation starts

The mystery dates to Feb. 13, when ODFW received a report of a dead bighorn ram on the Snake River Road near Connor Creek, about 18 miles north of Huntington.

Ratliff said samples from the sheep were tested, and the results showed the novel strain of bacteria.

There is no vaccine for the bacteria, nor any other type of effective treatment for such a large herd of wild animals, Ratliff said.

Biologists later euthanized a sick ewe, and a Washington lab confirmed the earlier diagnosis.

Because the bacteria strain is new to Oregon, the Lookout Mountain bighorns couldn’t have contracted the disease from other bighorns in the state, Ratliff said.

These types of bacteria are typically found in domestic sheep and goats, and Ratliff said he hopes to test animals that might have interacted with Lookout Mountain bighorns, although the source of the infection could be something else.

He can’t require livestock owners to comply, but he said he’s talked with some who seem willing to have their animals tested.

“It would be good to gain that information,” Ratliff said.

A factor that could complicate how ODFW deals with the pneumonia outbreak is that some bighorns will shed the bacteria constantly or intermittently — meaning they can infect others — while some sheep won’t shed.

Ratliff said he would like to be able to test as many bighorns as possible to determine which animals are constant or intermittent shedders. Depending on how many sheep die, it might be necessary in the future to euthanize shedders to preserve a herd that can be supplemented by bringing in bighorns from elsewhere.

That’s how the Lookout Mountain herd was established in the early 1990s, and the animals have thrived in the steep canyons on the breaks of the Snake River.

“It’s been the healthiest herd in Oregon,” Ratliff said.

The only previous concern among Lookout Mountain bighorns was a minor rash of pneumonia that lasted a couple months in 2012, he said. Those illnesses were caused by a virus rather bacteria, but it was a mild type that killed few bighorns, Ratliff said.

### Previous outbreaks

Pneumonia outbreaks in

other herds have been much more dire.

One of those eventually eliminated the Sheep Mountain bighorn herd that lived north of the Lookout Mountain herd.

The Sheep Mountain herd, which ODFW started with transplants in 1988, grew to nearly 100 sheep by the late 1990s, Ratliff said.

But then a ram from the herd crossed into Idaho, contracted viral pneumonia, returned to Oregon and infected the herd here.

By 2007 the Sheep Mountain herd was down to 10 animals — all ewes.

Because those sheep seemed immune, ODFW trapped a single ram in Wallowa County and released it on Sheep Mountain, hoping to start rebuilding the herd.

But that ram quickly died from pneumonia, proving that the ewes, though not ill, were still shedding the virus, Ratliff said.

In 2015, with just three ewes left, ODFW euthanized the remaining animals, he said.

The main concern was that the nearby Lookout Mountain herd, which was healthy and growing, would expand its territory and contract the illness from the Sheep Mountain animals.

Ratliff said he harbors a similar concern now.

The Lookout Mountain herd is close enough to represent a potential threat to Baker County’s other bighorn herd, which roams in the Burnt River Canyon southeast of Baker City, between Durkee and Bridgeport.

Although those bighorns are a different subspecies — California — they’re just as susceptible to viruses and bacteria that cause pneumonia, Ratliff said.

He said ODFW employees will be monitoring the Burnt River herd for any signs of illness.



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